

Focus

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Web site: <http://www.oecd.org/puma/focus>

Strengthening government-citizen connections OECD working group looks at public consultation

On 29 and 30 November 1999, the OECD Working Group on Strengthening Government-Citizen Connections met in Paris. Thirty representatives from twenty-two countries participated. The main purpose of the meeting was to consider and learn from country case studies and responses to a questionnaire on "Strengthening Government-Citizen Connections", and thus support Member country efforts to improve information flows, consultation and active involvement of citizens in policy development.

Country case studies

Five case studies were presented:

- health care policy in Canada;
- health care policy in Denmark;
- environmental protection in the United States;
- public housing in France; and
- a public works programme in Hungary.

These case studies will shortly be made available on the PUMA web site: <http://www.oecd.org/puma/>. Several other countries said they would be willing to carry out such studies in 2000.

Questionnaire results

Twenty-one Member countries and the European Commission responded to the first OECD survey on "Strengthening Government-Citizen Connections". Participants found the survey exercise particularly useful. Preparing a response to the questionnaire had enabled central government units to obtain a clear and instructive picture of what was being done in their countries to develop connections with citizens.

Initial findings

OECD countries clearly view the issue of government-citizen relations with growing concern. Several countries cited low or declining confidence in public institutions as one motivation for recent initiatives to strengthen govern-

ment-citizen connections. A related trend cited by many of these countries was declining participation in political parties. Many others cited pressures created by increased citizen demands for information and expectations that government provide more responsive and better quality service. There is a growing perception in OECD countries that representative democracy is not working as well as it has in the past.

Thus, governments are looking to new or improved models and approaches for better informing and involving citizens in the policy-making process. Such participatory democracy is not intended to replace representative democracy, but rather to supplement it and compensate for its perceived failure to fully address citizens' democratic interests. At stake are the legitimacy of public policies and the capacities of governments to implement them effectively, with the support of an informed public.

At the same time, there are many barriers to greater transparency and more effective public consultation. Some country representatives acknowledge privately that *too much* democracy can have a negative effect on public policy. More information and public involvement can pose a threat to political leaders' control of the policy

agenda, potentially providing ammunition for rival political groups and making it easier for opposition groups to slow down or kill proposals. Public consultation is also sometimes used to defer difficult decisions and deflect controversy to a later date, a tactic which can undermine citizen trust in the value of participating in such processes.

Different governments are focusing on different priorities in their relationship with the citizen. Countries with high levels of education and an active civil society are responding to stronger demands for meaningful consultation in policy development. Others with lower socio-economic levels or those recently in transition to democracy, with less participatory traditions, are tending to focus first on ensuring that they have effective laws and institutions in place and well-functioning public programmes. Differences in cultures, size, legal and political systems also contribute to differing approaches and priorities. Likewise, different sectors appear to approach consultation in different ways: questionnaire responses frequently cited examples of extensive information and consultation initiatives in such areas as health, education, land use planning and the environment. Consultation on issues such as trade, foreign policy and budget formulation often took more restricted forms, focusing on expert input and NGOs as representative stakeholders, rather than involving the citizen at large.

However, ensuring access to government information appears to be a concern of all OECD countries. In some cases, the main reason is to promote democratic participation; in others, the focus is on transparency as an instrument for ensuring accountability and combating corruption.

Next steps

It is planned to produce a comprehensive report on the results of the work, along with shorter reports focusing on particular aspects. The working group will meet again in Spring 2000 to discuss the results of a questionnaire on the use of new information and communications technologies to strengthen government-citizen connections. ■

● Linking up with “telecottages”

In **Hungary**, an extensive “telecottage movement” has evolved in rural areas over the past several years. These telecottages provide a variety of services requiring modern information and communications technology, e.g. telebanking, teleworking, distance teaching, electronic commerce, public information, cultural activities. The central government has launched a programme called “OK Telecottage” to make greater use of this network to reach citizens in remote areas and small villages. Specific uses include providing information and, in some cases, services to the public; helping citizens understand administrative procedures (e.g. taxation, land registry); improving the operation of municipal government; and aiding local economic development. Ten telecottages will be selected through competitive bidding to receive training in providing public information and helping with administrative matters. These telecottages will be provided with free telephone lines and wage support. For further information, see <http://www.telehaz.hu>.

● Connecting government services

In September 1997, **Australia** launched Centrelink, a “one-stop-shop” that delivers a range of government services to citizens on behalf of the following departments:

- Family and Community Services;
- Education, Training and Youth Affairs;
- Health and Aged Care;
- Transport and Regional Services;
- Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business;
- Veterans’ Affairs; and
- Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry.

Centrelink has simplified arrangements through an integrated network of offices across the country. It offers a variety of ways to do business: in the office by appointment, over the telephone, via on-line computer services and through home visits. As part of a new initiative, individuals are assessed at the point of registration to determine the type and range of assistance they need. For more information, see <http://www.centrelink.gov.au>.

● Health information online

The **United Kingdom’s** National Health Service (NHS) has launched two new services: NHS Direct and NHS Direct Online. The first is a 24-hour telephone advice service staffed by nurses. NHS Direct Online is a complementary Internet service that offers information on health-related stories in the UK news, an interactive healthcare guide, a reference guide to the NHS and its services, answers to frequently asked questions, and information on NHS Direct. For more information, see the NHS Direct Online web site at <http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk>.

● One-stop-shop for businesses

Spain is setting up one-stop-shops for persons interested in creating and developing small and medium-sized businesses. Three administrative levels come together in a single office where citizens can obtain information and start the necessary administrative procedures for launching a business. Such offices have already been set up in several parts of the country, and it is planned to create them in the capitals of all the Autonomous Communities.

Contact:

General Directorate of Inspection, Simplification and Service Quality
 General Inspectorate of State Administrative Services
 Calle Maria de Molina, 50
 28071 Madrid
<http://www.igsap.map.es>
 E-mail: amador.elena@igsap.map.es

● Looking at the health sector

The **French** Ministry of Health conducted a public consultation project before undertaking major reforms in the health sector. Running from September 1998 to April 1999, the project, known as *États Généraux de la Santé*, was carried out across the country and involved 200,000 people. Three types of consultation were applied:

- citizen fora, in which small working groups questioned experts during public debates, summarised conclusions and made recommendations;
- fora on hospital policy, grouping 300-400 people per region to discuss the revision of regional health organisation plans; and
- users committees, which grew out of the above hospital policy fora as a way to continue public consultation on the regional level.

● Public sector learning and reform

The **Danish** government, in co-operation with the Association of County Councils and the National Association of Local Authorities, has launched a project, “Service & Welfare”. The project creates a framework for public sector learning and reform and promotes public debate on future challenges for the public sector. Electronic networks bring together public sector professionals experimenting with new ways of carrying out public tasks. Specific initiatives are analysed and evaluated, and the results communicated to the relevant networks and the general public. Work will also be undertaken on providing information about services and electronic access to services. Finally, to promote public debate on the future of the welfare state, a series of public conferences are being held, pamphlets have been published on various issues, and a forum for public debate has been created on the project’s web site. For more information, see <http://www.service-og-velfaerd.dk>.

● Capability, accountability and performance

The **New Zealand** State Services Commission has launched a pilot programme called CAP – capability, accountability and performance. The objective is to help streamline the accountability system and ensure the performance and capability of public service departments. Under the pilot programme, a small number of departments will prepare, operate under and report against a more comprehensive and integrated type of strategic business plan. These departments will also be subject to a new performance evaluation system, including an assessment against the elements of the Business Excellence Model of the European Foundation for Quality Management.

Contact:

Mr. Mark Robinson, Team Leader
Capability Assessment
State Services Commission
E-mail: mark.robinson@ssc.govt.nz

● Forum for Democratic Development

In November 1999, the **Netherlands** created a “Forum for Democratic Development” as a platform for debates on topics such as interactive forms of government, the social values needed for democracy, the effects of economic change on democracy, the importance of education, and the role of political parties. The Forum will be independent of the government, and its board members are recruited from a broad spectrum of social categories and activities. For the first five years (1999-2003) it will be financially supported by the Ministry of the Interior. For more information (in Dutch only), see <http://www.forumdemocratie.nl>.

*More detailed information
on country initiatives
is available on PUMA's website:
<http://www.oecd.org/puma/country/>.*

● Promoting ethics in the public service

In August 1999, the **Japanese** Diet passed the National Public Service Ethics Law, which will be fully effective in April 2000. The law includes the following provisions:

- An obligation for senior officials to report gifts, favours, etc., that exceed 5000 yen in value.
- An obligation for senior officials to report their stock holdings and income.
- The establishment of a National Public Service Ethics Board in the National Personnel Authority, responsible for ethical affairs, e.g. training, reviewing the above-mentioned obligatory reports, investigating and punishing unethical conduct. The Cabinet, with the consent of the Diet, appointed the president and members of the Board in December 1999.
- The establishment, by government order, of Ethics Instructions to prohibit or restrict certain types of conduct by public service officials.

● Assessing the impact of legislation

Germany is developing its system for assessing the impact of legal measures – their effect on public budgets, prices, the consumer, the environment, and the cost of their implementation in the public and private sectors — to make the system more rational and reliable. A series of projects at both federal and *Länder* level have indicated various solutions for assessing the impact of laws. These results are being further developed and systematised, with the aim of producing a user-oriented manual for general use. In addition, the rules of procedure for federal law-making are under review.

Contact:

Mr. Klaus-Henning Rosen
Director General
Federal Ministry of the Interior
Alt-Moabit 101 D
10559 Berlin
Tel. +49-30-39.81.21.70
Fax +49-30-39.81.16.49

● Reforming the administration

Following the installation of a new government in July 1999, **Belgium** is undertaking a reform of its public administration. The Prime Minister has created a working group to look at the structure and role of the administration. This group will submit its findings at end February 2000. A consultation exercise on what citizens expect from public services will also be carried out this year. In addition, a special allocation has been made in the 2000 budget for administrative modernisation. Work will focus on, *inter alia*, streamlining and redefining administrative structures and processes, giving more autonomy to management and business units, developing internal communications, designing a new “expert” career path, and assessing managers. A top expert will be recruited to manage the state’s information technology policy. Another working group is looking at the principles of an effective personnel policy.

● A more flexible administration

Poland implemented an Act on Areas of Government Work in September 1999. Under this Act, which specifies 32 areas of government work (portfolios), ministers are responsible for policy and strategy in particular areas and no longer for rigidly specified work of given ministries and central offices. The Act also strengthens the position of the Prime Minister, who can redistribute the portfolios to members of government, leaving technical units tied to a given area rather than a particular ministry. The implementation of the Act should lead to a reduction in government jobs and remove rigid divisions of competence between organs of the state administration.

Contact:

Office of the Civil Service
Aleje J. Szucha 2/4
PL-00-582 Warsaw

Public sector performance contracting

Performance contracts are emerging as a key tool of performance and accountability management in an increasingly devolved public sector. PUMA's recent publication on performance contracting describes the many different types of contractual arrangements that

are included under this umbrella term. The analysis shows that performance contracts are a flexible management instrument that can be used to define responsibilities and expectations between parties at the individual, organisational and inter-organisational level.

Schema of performance contracting

Type of performance contracting	Parties involved	Characteristics
Framework agreements	A minister and a chief executive	Cover over-arching strategies and priorities for a department or agency.
Budget contracts and resource agreements	Central budget office or finance ministry and a chief executive of a department or agency	Provide budget authority and flexibility in exchange for agreed performance targets.
Organisational performance agreements	A minister and a chief executive, or a chief executive and senior managers	Break down overall strategic goals into programme elements, setting specific targets in exchange for increased operational autonomy.
Chief executive performance agreements	A minister and a chief executive, or senior management and staff at various levels	Specify levels of performance to be achieved. Often complement organisational performance agreements.
Funder-provider agreements	Ministers and chief executives, for example	Clarify responsibilities by separating the roles of funder and provider of services. Specify outputs, including factors such as timing, volume, cost and quality.
Intergovernmental performance contracts and partnership arrangements	National and local or regional governments, for example	Provide funding in exchange for specified levels and quality of service.
Customer service agreements	Government services	Statements of service standards provided by a service or programme to its clients. Not negotiated, but often developed with input from customers.

Nine country-based case studies illustrate the experiences of OECD countries with different forms of performance contracts. These case studies are available on PUMA's website: see <http://www.oecd.org/puma/online.htm>. The synthesis report, *Lessons from Performance Contracting Case Studies*, distils factors that public managers should consider in designing and managing performance

contracts. One important message of the report is not to overspecify performance contracts. Thus, the *Framework for Public Sector Performance Contracting* addresses in more detail the issue of specification. It provides public managers with concrete recommendations on the degree of specification that is desirable in different kinds of circumstances. ■

● Developing senior staff

Over the past few years, **Finland** has been reforming the selection criteria and recruitment methods for senior civil servants in order to improve the possibilities for outside candidates. At the same time, it was necessary to retain advancement possibilities for civil servants. To this end, the Ministry of Finance launched a project in late 1997.

The project's objectives were to:

- Emphasise both the importance of systematic development for managerial and expert positions and, more generally, the consideration of potential managerial resources.
- Develop concrete measures to assess and develop potential new managers and experts.
- Improve opportunities for women in higher-level managerial positions.

The project was carried out in eight pilot organisations, including the Ministry of the Interior, the Finnish Meteorological Institute, and Sibelius Academy. The final project report was submitted in October 1999 to the Ministry of Finance, who subsequently published it (in Finnish only).

Contact:

Mr. Asko Lindqvist
Counsellor
Ministry of Finance
Tel. +358-9-160.49.89
E-mail: asko.lindqvist@vm.vn.fi

● Rethinking personnel management

In February 1999, following new legislation for public sector labour contracts, the **Italian** Department of the Civil Service launched a project, "Rethinking Personnel Management in the Public Sector". Its objectives are twofold:

- Support public administration in the definition of human resources management policies that are consistent with national objectives.
- Facilitate change and develop tools and methodologies to improve human resources management (HRM).

The project involves 1030 administrations, representing over 50% of all public employees in Italy. Participants form an interactive network organised around learning labs where innovative HRM policies and tools are developed and compared. The degree of innovation in HRM policies since the introduction of new labour contracts will also be studied. The project will run until November 2000, and expected results include a manual for HRM in the public administration. For more information see <http://www.funpub.it/lavoropubblico/menu.html>.

Contact:

Ripensare il lavoro pubblico
Dipartimento della Funzione Pubblica
Corso Vittorio Emanuele II, 116
00186 Roma
Tel. +39-06-68.99.73.31
Fax +39-06-68.99.72.17

● A new Open Personnel System

Korea is implementing a new Open Personnel System (OPS), which will introduce competition into the civil service and enhance the transparency of administrative services. Under the new system, more than 20 % of senior positions in 52 central agencies will be open to outside candidates. Not included are positions related to public security such as the National Intelligence Service and public prosecutors, as well as soldiers, policemen and firefighters. To operate the OPS, the Civil Service Commission was created in May 1999. It will select potential posts, establish standards and procedures for recruitment, and review the qualifications of senior officials.

Contact:

Mr. Tae-Kyum KIM
Director-General, Administrative Management Bureau
Ministry of Government Administration and
Home Affairs
Tel. +82-2-37.03.46.09 Fax +82-2-37.03.55.29
Email: taekkim@mogaha.go.kr

● Public service employment database

Australia has created a new public service employment database that records the employment history of all public service officers employed under the Public Service Act 1922. Information collected includes career histories and details relevant to the operation of the Equal Employment Opportunity programme. All records continue to be maintained confidentially, within security and privacy legislation. The database captures data directly from individual agencies' human resources systems. In the long term, it will be possible for agencies to access reports from the database using a web-based system. For further information, see

<http://www.psmpc.gov.au/apsedonline.html>.

Contact:

Ms. Jenny Harrison
Tel. +61-2-62.72.35.63
E-mail: jenny_harrison@psmpc.gov.au

● Management evaluation systems

In **Norway**, the Directorate of Public Management (*Statskonsult*) is compiling a report on management evaluation systems and how to implement them in the Norwegian public administration. Many top officials in the public administration have switched to a contractual wage scheme, which includes an annual evaluation linked to performance-related pay. As a first step, information is being gathered from the private sector as well as professional and public sector bodies that already use evaluation systems. Following the report's completion at the end of 1999, pilot projects in selected ministries will be launched.

Contact:

Mr. Odd Bohagen, Deputy Director General
Ministry of Labour and Government Administration
Tel. +47-22-24.48.20 Fax +47-22-24-48.89
E-mail: odd.bohagen@aad.dep.telemax.no

●New pension fund for state employees

In early 1997, **Iceland** introduced a new Government Employees' Pension Fund Act. All new employees have had to join the new fund, while existing employees were allowed to choose between joining the new fund or remaining in the old. Under the old system, members pay premiums on their basic salary only, and upon retirement receive a certain percentage (based on number of years of service) of basic pay. The pension is thereafter linked to the average rise in pay of government employees. Members of the new system pay a premium on their total income and earn retirement rights on the basis of total premiums paid. The pension rights are linked to the consumer price index. Employers must periodically adjust premiums to ensure that the fund's premium income matches its commitments. For further information, see the Ministry of Finance's website: <http://stjr.is/fjr>.

Contact:

Mr. Gunnar Björnsson
Director General
Department of Personnel Policy
Ministry of Finance
Tel. +354-560.93.40 Fax +354-562.36.90
E-mail: gunnar.bjornsson@fjr.stjr.is

●New Public Service Act

In October 1999 **Australia** passed the Public Service Act 1999, replacing the previous Act dating from 1922. The new Act is less than one-fifth of the size of the old, and has been rewritten in plain English. It provides a framework for the Australian Public Service (APS), devolving to agency heads broad powers for the recruitment, pay and employment conditions of staff. Agency heads are held directly accountable for their use of these powers. For further information, see <http://www.psmpc.gov.au>.

Contact:

Mr. Jeff Lamond
Public Service and Merit Protection Commission
Tel. +61-2-62.72.35.54
E-mail: jeff_lamond@psmpc.gov.au

●Reforming the civil service

On 1 July 1999, **Poland's** new Civil Service Act came into effect. Objectives in drafting the Act were: to bring all public servants in the government administration under a single piece of legislation; to harmonise regulations concerning the civil service with the new Constitution; to prepare the civil service for administrative reforms; and to comply with European Union accession requirements concerning equal access for all citizens to the civil service. A new system of promotion and pay should improve the administration's functioning and help prevent corruption. In August 1999, the Prime Minister appointed a Civil Service Council to advise on the functioning of the civil service, to supervise qualification procedures, and to assess candidates for Head of the Civil Service.

Public Management in Finland

special English-language edition of the Finnish journal "*Hallinto-lehti*"

Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Internal Affairs, and Stellatum Oy, Finland, 1999, 47 pages

This special edition is aimed at an international audience and provides a picture of today's Finnish administration. The 17 articles give examples that highlight its originality and modernity. Topics include personnel management, local administration, evaluation practices, competition and privatisation, information management, quality in the public sector, service delivery, and the Committee for the Future. Available from:

Ministry of Finance
Public Management Department
P.O.Box 286
FIN-00171 Helsinki
Tel:+358-9-16.01

Administrative Innovation Programme of the Federal Government, Austria

Final Report, October 1999, 50 pages

The Austrian federal government launched the *Verwaltungsinnovationsprogramm* (VIP) in December 1997. Through a number of projects and individual measures since then, the state is being consistently transformed from a regulator to a service provider. With the introduction of business management methods, the public administration has been able to improve its efficiency, output and productivity. The involvement of the largest possible number of public officials and the constructive co-operation of the Public Service Union helped give rise to a wave of sustainable modernisation, the effects of which are already being perceived by citizens. Available from:

Federal Ministry of Finance
Wollzeile 1-3 A-1010 Wien
Tel:+43-1-514.33.71.48

Ministry of Planning and Budget

Government of the Republic of Korea, 1999, 12 pages

This short brochure describes the new Korean Ministry of Planning and Budget (MPB), which was established in May 1999 by consolidating two former government units. The MPB operates with a staff of 248 persons, and its responsibilities fall broadly into four categories: fiscal planning; budget management; government and public sector reform; budget formulation and execution. Organigrams, charts and statistics are included. Available from:

Ministry of Planning and Budget
520-3 Banpo-dong, Seocho-ku
Seoul 137-756
Tel:+82-2-34.80.09.90
<http://www.mpb.go.kr>

Guía de Autoevaluación para la Administración Pública

Ministry for Public Administration, Spain, 1999
ISBN 84-340-1106-9, 118 pages

The Self-Assessment Guide for Public Administration was presented jointly in June 1999 by the Spanish Minister of Public Administration and the President of the *Club Gestión de Calidad*. The Guide is based on the Excellence Model of the European Foundation for Quality Management. Self-assessment against that Model will enable different units of the Spanish administration to understand their situation and learn their strong points and the areas for improvement. This represents a major milestone in the history of Spanish public administration because, until now, the Model had been used primarily in the private sector. In 1999 the Model was applied to 20 administrative units in 13 ministries. In 2000, the Model will be extended to the whole of the state administration.

Available in Spanish only from:

Imprenta Nacional del Boletín
Oficial del Estado
Avenida de Manoteras, 54
E-28050 Madrid

PUMA publishes reports on a wide range of public management topics. For listings of PUMA publications (both free documents and for-sale books), see <http://www.oecd.org/puma/>.

Balancing measures: best practices in performance management

National Partnership for Reinventing Government, United States, August 1999, 63 pages

The Government Performance and Results Act was passed by the United States Congress in 1993. Since then, the National Performance Review, and its successor the National Partnership for Reinventing Government, have continually been exploring the best ways to improve performance management. This study examines the ways and means by which government organisations are trying to include customers, stakeholders and employees in their performance management efforts. Five best practices stand out: establish a results-oriented set of measures that balance business, customer, and employee; establish accountability at all levels of the organisation; collect and analyse data; connect the performance management efforts to the business plan and the budget; share the leadership role. Available from:

National Partnership for Reinventing Government
750 Seventeenth Street, NW
Washington, DC 20006
<http://www.npr.gov>

The public service in Germany

Federal Ministry of the Interior, March 1999, 142 pages

This brochure allows readers to gain an insight into the public service in Germany. It provides answers to frequently asked questions about the administrative structure of the federal, *Länder* and local authorities, and about the number, distribution, salaries and other working conditions of public service staff. The German public service law is included in an annex. Available in German, English and French from:

Public Relations Section/Abteilung Öffentlicher Dienst
Federal Ministry of the Interior/Bundesministerium
des Innern
Alt-Moabit 101 D D-10559 Berlin
Tel:+49-30-39.810 Fax:+49-30-39.81.29.26

Public sector - a question of confidence. Statement on Administration Policy

Ministry of Labour and Government Administration, Norway, April 1999, 16 pages

This is the text of the policy statement to the Norwegian *Storting* (Parliament) by the Minister of Labour and Government Administration. Three key themes are developed. The first is the citizen, user and the public administration: democracy, user orientation, transparency and service. The second is the public administration: management, readjustment and decentralisation. The third is the public administration and its staff: competence, attitudes and readjustment. Available from:

Statens trykksakekspedisjon
Postboks 8169 Dep.
N-0034 Oslo
Fax:+47-22.24.27.86
E-mail: ste-bestilling@ft.dep.telemax.no

Public Administration: Imprints of Reform 1999

Federal Academy of Public Administration, Austria, 87 pages

This volume of 15 articles offers an in-depth perspective of the organisational culture and motivation that shape the activities of VAB International, an integrated department of the Austrian Federal Academy of Public Administration that initiates and participates in projects primarily in Central and Eastern Europe. Topics cover the Austrian experience of EU accession, modernisation trends and perspectives of the future of public administration, the "new public management", institution building, evaluation, knowledge transfer, trainer education, theory and practise of organisational development, and certain aspects of public administration in Bulgaria, Slovenia and Slovakia. Available from:

Federal Academy of Public Administration (VAB)
Mauerbachstrasse 43 A-1140 Wien
Tel. +43-1-979.15.01 Fax +43-1-979.15.01.35
E-mail: vab.international@vab.gv.at
<http://www.vab.ac.at>

Senior officials discuss governance and citizens

On 11 and 12 October 1999, senior officials from centres of government met in Naples, Italy to discuss questions of governance facing policy-makers. In all, 22 Member countries and the European Commission were represented at the meeting, which was hosted by the Italian government and the City of Naples.

Closer to citizens

The first session looked at how to strengthen government's connection with citizens, both through representative democratic institutions and more direct citizen participation in the policy-making process. Participants compared the advantages and drawbacks of public consultation and examined the different levels of relations with citizens (national, local). They stressed that the

nature and development of government-citizen relations depended on the cultural, social and economic characteristics of each country. They also noted the coherence problems raised by the diversity of groups claiming to represent citizens' views (NGOs, political parties, consumer groups...). Participants agreed that improving government-citizen relations meant, in particular, addressing how citizens view politicians and government.

Policymaking in Italy

The second session featured a presentation of the Italian co-ordination and decision-making process for public administration reforms. High-level Italian reform practitioners provided a concrete description of the role of the centre of government in the reforms.

Common issues

The third session was dedicated to issues of common concern to heads of government. After a presentation of managing cross-cutting issues in Canada, participants focused on the issues of balancing budgetary and political considerations in medium- and longer-term policy-making and maintaining political will over the long term. Finally, the discussion returned to relations with citizens with the recognition that cross-cutting policies themselves are an attempt to treat citizens' needs in a coherent manner.

Future work

Hungary offered to host the next meeting of senior officials from centres of government, which will be held in Budapest in Autumn 2000. ■

For information on OECD work on public management, see <http://www.oecd.org/puma>

● Electronic Government Procurement

The **Mexican** Electronic System for Government Procurement, called Compranet, was developed by the Ministry of the Comptrollership and Administrative Development (SECODAM) as a universal public-access system for carrying out public-sector tendering via electronic data interchange. An Internet site was made available to the public in 1996, where it is possible to consult information on the different stages of the procurement process of all ministries, agencies and entities of the federal public administration. As of October 1999, there are more than 6000 public sector tenders logged daily, and more than 20,000 service-providing firms as regular users. For more information, see <http://compranet.gob.mx>.

Contact:

Ministry of the Comptrollership and Administrative Development (SECODAM)
(SECODAM)
Insurgentes Sur No. 1735
Col. Guadalupe Inn
CP01020 Mexico, D.F

● Surveying citizens' needs

In spring 1998, the **Canadian** Centre for Management Development, in partnership with other public sector bodies, undertook the country's most comprehensive survey yet on service delivery, known as "Citizens First". The aim was to determine Canadians' needs, expectations, satisfaction and priorities for service improvement. More than 2900 citizens completed the survey. Results indicate that Canadians rate the quality of public sector services as comparable to those of the private sector. They also identified five key drivers of satisfaction: timeliness, competence, courtesy, fairness, and outcome. The survey results are being used by the government as the basis for its citizen-centred service delivery strategy, which focuses on improving access and service performance in priority areas. The next "Citizens First" survey will be conducted in 2000, and bi-annually thereafter.

Contact:

Canadian Centre for Management and Development
<http://www.ccmd-ccg.gc.ca>

Focus

Head of Communications, PUMA:

Geraldine Byrne-Nason

Editor-in-Chief:

Andrea Uhrhammer

Editor, "From the Bookshelf":

Deirdre Wolfender

Administrative Co-ordinator:

Marie Murphy

Copy Editors:

Claude Jacqmin,

Deirdre Wolfender

Contributors:

Christian Vergez (pages 1, 8),

Elke Löffler (page 4)

Contact *Focus* at:

PUMA/OECD

2, rue André-Pascal

75775 Paris Cedex 16 France

Fax +33-1-45.24.87.96

E-mail: pum.contact@oecd.org

<http://www.oecd.org/puma/focus>

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